Special Issue On That Prison Camp Raid, Pps. 1-4

Nixon's Secret Plan For Peace Turning Out To Be Warmed-Over LBJ

If it is now decided that we must go for an all-out military victory and force the North Vietnamese to surrender, in effect, by punishing them, I think we ought to know it. *—Fulbright in the Senate November 23.*

Nixon should tell this country clear and loud and again and again that he will not end the war except upon a favorable basis to the future of South Vietnam and the future of American policy in Asia. That is what he wants, and there is nothing to be gained by hiding his real purposes behind assurances that the war will be over by 1972.

—Richard Wilson, a columnist with good White House sources, in the Washington Star *November 27.*

I. F. Stone's Bi-Weekly

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The Games That Pentagon People Play

One question about Vietnamization must keep Nixon awake at night. This may be one reason for the POW camp raid. If Vietnamization works, then the enemy just "fades away," as the U.S. military have so long hoped. But then how and when does he get the prisoners back? A prisoner exchange normally follows the ending of hostilities, but the whole point of Vietnamization is so to strengthen the Saigon regime as to force the other side to accept its terms or face defeat in a slow winding down of the war. This may take years. At best sporadic guerrilla and terrorist activity could continue for a decade or more as in Malaysia. He may have felt that some drastic diversionary action was required before the country became aware of the dismal outlook for the prisoners under Vietnamization, and of the hopes held out by the other side's new 8-point proposal of September 17. Last year's 10-point plan suggested that the release of prisoners would be negotiated only after the total withdrawal of U.S. troops. This year's 8-point proposal promised to begin negotiations on the release of prisoners immediately, once the U.S. publicly committed itself to withdraw all its forces by next June 30, or—as privately suggested in Paris—by some other not too distant fixed date. As this sinks in, the government's POW propaganda campaign may boomerang. The country has been led to believe that Nixon intends to get out of Vietnam soon anyway. People may begin to ask why not set a fixed date if the enemy does indeed promise in return to release all POWs.

Another Numbers Game

Before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee Laird said we were ready to exchange 36,000 prisoners on our side for the 3,000 he said were being held in the North.* "At no time in the history of the world," Laird said, "has there been such a dramatic proposal." In a normal war, between equally matched opponents, that would be a dramatic, indeed an inconceivable proposal before a peace agreement had been reached. As ABC's John Scali asked after Laird put this proposal on *Issue and Answers* Oct. 11—"If they get 30,000 prisoners back in one fell swoop won't that help solve their manpower problem?" Laird replied unctuously, "We are concerned about human beings." What he told neither Scali nor the Senate Foreign Relations Committee is that never in the history of the world—to echo his phrase—has there ever been such a dramatic difference between the investment represented by the 36,000 prisoners on our side and the 300 or more U.S. pilots held by Hanoi.

These are without a doubt the world's most expensive soldiers. The mean cost of training a combat pilot was given by the Pentagon at the time we stopped the bombing at $450,000. Pilots for an advanced aircraft like the F-105 in use over Vietnam cost considerably more. The Pentagon's current figure for the specialized training to fly an F105 is $471,400. This does not include the $85,970 for his "wings," i.e. his general training as a flier nor such minor items at $1,200 for survival training. These three add up to $558,570. In dollar terms, 300 U.S. combat pilots probably cost many times more to train than 300,000 guerrillas. At the time of the bombing halt in 1968

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Cutest Little Prevaricator In Town

Sen. CHURCH: What do you expect the bombing will accomplish?

Sec. LAIRD: The bombing, I think, will stop the violation of these understandings.

CHURCH: Has the bombing in the past ever caused the enemy to acquiesce in our demands or to make concessions?

LAIRD: Yes, it has.

CHURCH: It has? When did it have that effect in the past?

LAIRD: Well, the last protective reaction flight that was flown in the North was in May, and after that strike there was an indication by the other side that they would abide by those understandings, and they did until the month of November when they shot down an unarmed reconnaissance plane . . .

CHURCH: Was this the only attack upon a reconnaissance plane that occurred or were there a series of attacks on reconnaissance planes?

Sec. LAIRD: We had attacks upon our planes, Senator Church. But this was the first plane shot down.

—Before Senate Foreign Relations, November 24.

*** Rampant inflation seems to have hit our POW figures. On ABC-TV's *Issues and Answers*, Oct 11, Laird said we held 30,000 POWs whom we were ready to exchange for "slightly over 2,000" in the North "and in the hands of the VC." On November 24 he increased the number of POWs held on the other side to 3,000. In Paris Dec. 2 Ambassador Bruce upped it again to "roughly 5,000." The latest Pentagon figures as of Nov. 28 give total U.S. missing in action in Indochina as 966 and U.S. POWs as 461 (379 in the North). This is a total of 1,427 in all Southeast Asia. But Laird told the Committee there were 3,000 prisoners in the North alone. When Senator Aiken asked him how many of these were South Vietnamese, Laird replied, "Not very many but some." Laird's statistics tend to be slippery.**

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Laird's Tactics Hardly Encourage Better POW Treatment By Hanoi . . .

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it was estimated that it had cost in the neighborhood of $200 million to train the "more than" 450 pilots killed or missing in the air war. (The total cost including planes and ordnance ran nearly to $4 billion.) The 339 prisoners North Vietnam admits to holding may well represent an investment close to $150,000,000. It did not add to the hope of their release for Secretary Laird to tell the Committee in public that many of the men held captive were ready to come back and fight again.

A Harmful Performance

Laird's performance like the raid on the abandoned POW camp was calculated to worsen conditions for the prisoners. The U.S. has been trying to obtain information about missing men. When Prof. Sidney Peck, an anti-war leader, visited Hanoi recently he was asked to inquire specifically about 17 men. The North Vietnamese authorities on checking the list reported that one of the men was being held as a prisoner of war, that ten others had never been captured in North Vietnam and that six were listed as dead. With this information he also brought back 571 letters from POWs to their families and word that all prisoners would be allowed to receive an 11-lb package and a postcard for Christmas, and that these should be mailed via Moscow.

Laird, in his usual tricky fashion, seized on the new information from Peck to tell the press that "a key factor" in the final decision to launch the abortive POW rescue mission "was the new information received this month that some of our men were dying in prisoner of war camps." Prof. Peck protested in an interview with the *Boston Globe* (Dec. 2), that the names of the six dead were given him only with their military serial numbers and no other information. "The men could have been dead when captured or mortally wounded," Prof. Peck said. A Washington official, whom the *Globe* described as having "access to all government information concerning the prisoners", confirmed the fact that there had been no other information or indication of maltreatment.

Prof. Peck told the *Globe* that the information he brought back had been "intentionally misused by the government to justify the military adventure in North Vietnam." Prof. Peck went to Hanoi for the Committee for Liaison With U.S. Servicemen Captured in Vietnam. Mrs. Cora Weiss, who organized the committee on her return from North Vietnam last December, said of Laird's performance, "What is so shocking, is that until this stunt by Washington, information about the prisoners that Americans have been begging for was beginning to come out of Hanoi. Now this information has been abused and misused to justify an act of war."

The Administration has been hostile since the beginning to the activities of Mrs. Weiss's committee. The improvement in communications and the opening of mail contacts run counter to the Administration's hate campaign.* The families of men missing in action have been sent photographs purporting to show torture of prisoners. Hanoi's best answer is to allow more mail to and from U.S. POWs.

Laird made only one specific allegation of mistreatment in his testimony to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee,

What's the Good Of A Fighter Escort If It Doesn't Fight Back When Attacked?

Sen. CASE: It is correct, is it not, that our reconnaissance planes are escorted by fighter-bombers?

Sec. LAIRD: That is correct.

Sen. CASE: If retaliation was an important thing, why didn't this occur with the use of the escort planes rather than as a separate item?

Sec. LAIRD: Well, Senator, as far as the standing orders are concerned and operating orders to our military forces, particularly our airmen, I would prefer not to discuss those in open session.

Sen. CASE: I rely on you to do the necessary in this regard.

Sec. LAIRD: But I want you to know there was no violation of any standing order . . .

Sen. CASE: Well, I do not question this, but I do think we ought to know a little bit more about it. If it is a wholly useless thing —

Sec. LAIRD: That is a matter that I am giving consideration to, to immediately retaliate . . .

—Before Senate Foreign Relations, Nov. 24.

*** Albert Speer in his recently published memoirs, *Inside The Third Reich*, has a footnote (p. 250) in which he discloses that when the Soviet Army allowed prisoners taken in the battle of Stalingrad to send postcards home, Hitler ordered the cards destroyed because it "might have mitigated the Russophobia" cultivated by his propaganda apparatus.**

As Corny As That Old Joke: The Operation Was A Success But The Patient Died

Q. On whom do you blame the intelligence failure?

Col. Arthur SIMONS (U.S. Army, who was in charge of the rescue raid on an empty POW camp): I can't answer that question at all. I am not sure I know what you mean by "intelligence failure."

—Laird's press conference at the Pentagon November 23 to introduce the leaders of the rescue party.

Sen. FULBRIGHT: I don't like to say it was all a bad idea simply because it failed, but it did fail. There was something wrong with the intelligence.

Sec. LAIRD: This was not a failure, Mr. Chairman, and I would —

Sen. FULBRIGHT: Well, it was a failure —

Sec. LAIRD: This mission was carried on by a group of men that performed the mission with 100 percent excellence.

Sen. FULBRIGHT: The men performed perfectly, but whoever directed it didn't, I mean. [Laughter].

Sec. LAIRD: These men knew full well the chance that there might not be POWs present.

Sen. FULBRIGHT: I'm not complaining about the men, but those men responsible for it.

Sec. LAIRD: I would like to tell you, Mr. Chairman, that we have made tremendous progress as far as intelligence is concerned. [Laughter].

Sen. FULBRIGHT: You mean since Friday?

—Before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee Nov. 24.

"My first reaction on hearing of the past weekend's attempt to rescue POW's was to think it must have been planned by the Saigon Army, or perhaps by the scriptwriter of a grade 'C' war movie. But when I read that the colonel in charge of the rescue party had responded to the press question, 'On whom do you blame the intelligence failure?' with 'I am not sure what you mean by intelligence failure,' I realized this was, indeed, an American operation. Who else could launch a rescue raid on a camp from which the prisoners had been evacuated several weeks earlier—if they had ever been there—and say, 'I'm not sure what you mean by intelligence failure?'"

—Rep. Leggett (D.-Calif.) in the House November 24.

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. . . The U.S. and Saigon Have Set The Other Side A Bad Example

though he said he had talked to all nine of the released prisoners. "I talked to two of the last three right here in Bethesda Hospital," he said, "and I know the kind of medical treatment they received, and it was not adequate." Inadequate medical treatment is a far cry from torture and not surprising in an underdeveloped country we had done our best to bomb back to the Stone Age. The medical treatment may not have been adequate by our standards but it seems in the case of at least one of the three most recently released prisoners to have been much better than he expected. No Senator asked Laird about Lt. Robert F. Frishman, one of the three most recently released. His right arm was badly shattered at the elbow when he was shot down during a bombing raid over North Vietnam. He said he feared his captors would amputate but his arm was saved by North Vietnamese surgeons. He and his two fellow prisoners said at their first meeting with the press here (*New York Times* Aug. 8, 1969) that they had been well treated and that their diet, while unappetizing, was nourishing.

Only Two "Telling It" To Hanoi

Only two of the nine prisoners who returned have enlisted in the "Tell It To Hanoi" lecture campaign. Lt. Frishman has changed his tune and turned to lecturing on the inhumanity of his captors. A *Boston Globe* reporter Min S. Yee, after talking to the others reported (Oct. 27) that those he interviewed disagreed with Lt. Frishman but could not speak out because they were still in the service. The only one he quoted was Major Norris Overly, whose B-57 was shot down in 1967 north of the DMZ. "I was abused, threatened, spat on and beaten," Major Overly told Yee. "But I could understand why those people would want to kill me. My guards saved my life three times. It was all strange: one moment someone would want to kill me. The next moment another Vietnamese would act toward me with such compassion that it staggered me." Of his time in captivity, Major Overly said, "We were well treated. I got no indoctrination, just a few books on Vietnamese history. We got plenty to eat and medical care when needed." But Major Overly has now also gone on the *Tell It To Hanoi* circuit and *Newsweek* (Nov. 30) reports that "his recollections of his captivity" are now "chilling." *Newsweek* seems to think his recollections may be overrefrigerated. It quotes one recent unnamed visitor to Hanoi as finding the "U.S. interpretation" of prisoner treatment by Hanoi "somewhat questionable." "For while accepting the fact that the POWs are surely under psychological pressures, this source believes," according to *Newsweek*, "that the rations and treatment—however bad they may seem by U.S. standards—are probably similar to those received by North Vietnamese troops."

The treatment of prisoners on our side has hardly set a good example. When Senator Fulbright brought up conditions at the "tiger cage" Con San prison in South Vietnam, Secretary Laird quickly shut him off by replying, "Senator, I do not want to get that particular story confused with prisoners of war." But as recently as last July 24 the International Red Cross made public a report charging that 24 North Vietnamese soldiers were imprisoned in this notorious camp, and that seven had been mistreated in violation of the Geneva Convention. The report said they were confined in their cells all day, kept in chains for 13 hours a day and were not given enough fresh food or drinking water." (*Facts on File*, p.568E1, 1970). A copy of the report was sent the U.S.

(Continued On Page 4)

A Body Count (We'd Bet) Nobody Ever Made

Sen. FULBRIGHT: You have information, I believe, that six of our men have died in prisoner-of-war camps?

Sec. LAIRD: That is correct. We had this information well over a week ago, and we have further information of 11 others.

Sen. FULBRIGHT: That is over what period, just recently, or over the last two or three years?

Sec. LAIRD: It was the first notification we have had of prisoners dying in North Vietnam prison camps . . .

Sen. FULBRIGHT: Do you know how many of their prisoners held by our side have died during this same period?

Sec. LAIRD: I will be very pleased to supply that information for you . . . I did not bring the total medical records with me today.

—Before Senate Foreign Relations November 24.

Now You See It, Now You Don't: That Unarmed Reconnaissance "Understanding"

There has been some talk about an understanding between North Vietnam and this government relative to the use of reconnaissance planes over the past two years. Frankly, I know of no such understanding.

—Majority Leader Mansfield in the Senate Nov. 24

Sen. CHURCH: Are you familiar, Mr. Secretary, with any understanding that permits the United States to fly reconnaissance missions over Vietnam?

Sec. LAIRD: Yes, I am.

Sen. CHURCH: Is that understanding in writing?

Sec. LAIRD: No. It is not.

Sen. CHURCH: What was the nature of that unwritten understanding?

Sec. LAIRD: . . . The enemy knows full well what those understandings are and every person that was involved in our government in a major negotiating role certainly is thoroughly familiar with that . . .

Sen. CASE: I take it what happened, in substance, when we said we would stop bombing, was that we announced three conditions that we expected to be fulfilled. There wasn't any kind of affirmative agreement, whether oral or tacit or anything else on the part of the other side, or anything very formal. Is that correct?

Sec. LAIRD: There was quite a debate, Senator Case. I spent a considerable amount of time reading the notes . . . and there was a great deal of discussion, and the other side was, the North Vietnamese were, certainly—they certainly had the understanding after that debate . . .

Sen. SYMINGTON: You are operating against a good many forces now. You are operating against Pathet Lao and the North Vietnamese and the Cambodian army and the Viet Cong, and it just might be that some of those forces do not agree with what was established in this verbal agreement that you referred to . . . so I am just saying that if we are going to react by bombing the North with fighter bombers based on something that happens in another country, I think we have to be careful that the people agree to what was agreed on, about which this country does not know the details in any way nor, to the best of my knowledge, does the Armed Services Committee.*

—Before Senate Foreign Relations November 24.

* Armed Services, an ally of the Pentagon, is usually kept well informed by it. Symington is the only Senator who serves on both those Committees.

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Our Geneva Convention Has Been "The Only Good Gook Is A Dead Gook"

(Continued From Page 3)

Government. Under the Geneva convention the power which captures a prisoner remains responsible for his treatment even if he has been handed over, as we hand over all our prisoners, to the South Vietnamese.

North Vietnam's ratification of the Geneva Convention in the 50s was qualified, as was that of the other Soviet states, by the proviso that it would not be applied to war criminals. Our indiscriminate bombing raids North and South—including the use of napalm and "anti-personnel" bombs—have for years violated international conventions designed to protect civilian populations. Our own Army's handbook, *The Law of Land Warfare,* says that belligerents are required to refrain "from employing any kind or degree of violence which is not actually necessary for military purposes and that they conduct hostilities with regard for the principles of humanity and chivalry." This reads like a cruel satire after what we have done in Vietnam. The truth is that U.S. forces have been as indifferent to international law in handling prisoners as in dealing with the civilian population generally. "The only good gook is a dead gook" has been the rule of thumb.

Torture Taken For Granted

The horrifying testimony taken here in Washington in three days of hearings by the National Veterans Inquiry Into U.S. War Crimes has only revealed again what has been common knowledge for years. I spoke to three witnesses who had been engaged in prisoner interrogation as part of their work for military intelligence in South Vietnam, and they all told the same terrible story of torture and murder. "The only time I ever heard of the Geneva convention," one of them told me, "was when I was given the card issued to all soldiers in case of capture, saying that I had abided by the Geneva convention and should be treated in accordance with it." This forbids the torture of prisoners to exact more from them than their rank and unit, and it extends this protection to guerrillas as well as regular forces. All three said the use of torture was taken for granted in the interrogation of soldiers and suspects.

The POW issue is being used to prepare the public for intensification of the war. Our military leaders have learned little from more than 15 years in Indochina. "Some senior officers," William Beecher reported from the Pentagon to the *New York Times* Nov. 26, in his special story on how the POW camp raid was planned, "even talked among themselves of an amphibious landing by a Marine division in North Vietnam aimed at so unnerving Hanoi's leaders they might quickly sue for peace and release all prisoners." "Some senior officers" should have their heads examined. The notion that one Marine division could accomplish overnight in the North what the French army couldn't do in eight years of war could occur only to a "Hogan's Heroes" mentality. "But these and other officers," Beecher's account continues, "convinced that the White House would never permit such a widening of the war, argued that the job could be done by small hand-picked teams, using surprise to overwhelm local guards and extricate the prisoners by helicopter." The use of the plurals indicates that the raid, like any good TV script, was to be part of a series of such exploits. This second proposal was put before Laird "in late spring or early summer" this year. We still do not know what contingency plans were accepted with it. What if the raiding party had itself been captured, or besieged in the POW camp, and sent out a cry for help lest it and the prisoners be wiped out? Were there contingency plans to rescue the rescuers? Nixon and Laird have both clearly hinted that they may try again. Next time we could find ourselves drawn into a wider invasion of the North, sentimentally fueled by an appeal to bring our boys home by Christmas—some Christmas in the 1980s, that is.

Footnote on Humanitarianism

This is a humanitarian subject matter.

—Laird on the POW camp raid to Fulbright at the Senate Foreign Relations hearing Nov. 24.

"Ten days ago the worst hurricane in history smashed into the Ganges Delta, killing perhaps as many as half a million people. There is ample food available in Dacca for all those who survived. But 10 days after the disaster, there is no transportation. The United States sent only four helicopters. Consider the contrast between this situation, the near indifference with which the United States has responded to this catastrophe, and the events in Vietnam. According to Secretary Laird, 200 multi-million dollar aircraft were sent into North Vietnam to 'remind Hanoi what the rules of the game are.' For such deadly war games we can deploy any amount of force, but for the disaster-stricken East Pakistanis, we can only send four helicopters."

—Rep. Don Edwards, (D.-Cal.) in the House Nov. 23.

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